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ABSTRACT

Three topics are discussed: (1) the meaning of feminist research; (2) what can be learned about research practices from feminist efforts to create empowering research designs; and (3) how postmodernism presents challenges to feminist empirical work. Feminist research puts the social construction of gender at the center of one's inquiry in order to correct both the invisibility and distortion of female experience in ways relevant to promoting equality. Feminist empirical work is multi-paradigmatic. In practice or praxis-oriented inquiry, the reciprocally educative process is more important than the product. In feminist inquiry, empowering methods, including dialogue and reflexivity, contribute to consciousness-raising and transformative social action. Interviews with 22 students at 3 points during their participation in an introductory women's studies course provided insights on student resistance to the liberatory curriculum. Both reflexivity and critique are desirable skills for students and faculty. As for the implications of postmodernism on feminist work, feminists are not attempting to substitute a different, more secure foundation for our formerly secure foundations of knowledge and understanding. Rather, they aim to produce an awareness of the complexity, contigency, and fragility of historical and cultural thoughts. Thirteen endnotes provide definitions, background, and commentary; an eight-page bibliography is included. (GDC)

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Feminist Perspectives on Empowering Research Methodologies

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> How to master those devilries, those moving phantoms of the unconscious, when a long history has taught you to seek out and desire only clarity, the clear perception of (fixed) ideas? Perhaps this is the time to stress technique again?. . . A detour into strategy, tactics, and practice is called for, at least as long as it takes to gain vision, self-knowledge, self-possession, even in one's decenteredness (Irigaray, 1985, p. 136).

By way of introduction, let me briefly state the many strands of this paper. One is my present research into student resistance to liberatory curriculum. As one cannot talk of students learning without talk of teachers teaching, I also look at empowering pedagogy. A second strand is my exploration of what it means to do empirical research in a postpositivist/postmodern era,[1] an era premised on the essential indeterminancy of human experiencing, "the irreducible disparity between the world and the knowledge we might have of it" (White, 1973). A final strand of this paper is my effort to unlearn the language I picked up through my interactions with Marxism as I was trying to define what kind of feminist I was and am and am becoming. I now call myself a "materialist feminist",[2] thanks largely to French social theorist, Christine Delphy (1984): but I have also, finally, grasped the essence of the "new French feminists": that I am a

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constantly moving subjectivity.[3]

A few years ago I wrote of women's studies as counter-hegemonic work, work designed to create and sustain opposition to the present maldistribution of power and resources (Lather, 1983, 1984). Women's studies, I argued in that earlier work, creates spaces where debate over power and the production of knowledge could be held "through its cogent argument that the exclusion of women from the knowledge base brings into question that which has passed for wisdom" (Lather, 1984, p. 54). C.A. Bowers terms such spaces "liminal cultural space that allows for the negotiation of new meanings" as traditional forms of cultural authority are relativized (1984, p. vii). He then clearly states my substantive focus in the research I am currently undertaking into student resistance to liberatory curriculum: that our challenge is to use such openings in a non-impositional way.

Bowers writes in his chapter, "Understanding the Power of the Teacher": Teachers need to problematize "areas of consensus belief, grounded in the habitual thinking of the past" (p. 58), but that the danger is substituting our own reifications for those of the dominant culture. This leaves the student without the conceptual tools necessary for genuine participation in the culture. Bowers goes on to argue that issues need to be explored in settings free of slogans and predetermined answers. Reproducing the conceptual map of the teacher in the mind of the student disempowers through reification and recipe approaches to knowledge. Unlike Freire, says Bowers, he does not believe that "the dialectical relationship of student to teacher can transcend the problem of cultural invasion" (p. 96). Issues of

imposition, hence, become of prime importance in understanding what happens in our classrooms in the name of empowering, liberatory education.

In addition to this substantive focus, I have spent the last few years wrestling with what it means to do empirical research in an unjust world (Lather, 1986a,b,c). This paper continues that dialogue by focusing on my ongoing efforts, begun in September, 1985, to study student resistance to the introductory women's studies course my colleagues and I teach at Mankato State University.[4] I especially focus on my own empirical work in this paper as an example of feminist efforts to create empowering and self-reflexive research designs.

My exploration is guided by three key assumptions. The first is that we live in a postpositivist/postmodern era, an era termed by LeCourt, "the decline of the absolutes" (1975, p. 49), as foundational views of knowledge are increasingly under attack (Bernstein, 1983; Smith, 1984; Sheridan, 1980; Gergen, 1985; Haraway, 1985; Harding, 1986). It is the end of the quest for a "God's Eye" perspective (Smith and Heshusius, 1986) and the confrontation of what Bernstein calls "the Cartesian Anxiety" (1983), the lust for absolutes, for certainty in our ways of knowing.

We live in a period of dramatic shift in our understanding of scientific inquiry, an age which has learned much about the nature of science and its limitations. It is a time of demystification, of discourse which disrupts "the smooth passage of 'regimes of truth'" (Foucault quoted in Smart, 1983, p. 135). Within empirical research grounded in such a world view, the search is for different ways of

making sense of human life, for different ways of knowing which do justice to the complexity, tenuity, and indeterminancy of most of human experience (Mishler, 1979). In sum, my first basic assumption is that a definitive critique of positivism has been established and that our challenge is to pursue the possibilities offered by a postpositivist/postmodern era.

My second assumption is that ways of knowing are inherently culture-bound and perspectival. Harding (1986) distinguishes between "coercive values--racism, classism, sexism--that deteriorate objectivity" and "participatory values--antiracism, anticlassism, antisexism--that decrease distortions and mystifications in our culture's explanations and understandings" (p. 249). This second assumption, then, argues that change-enhancing, advocacy approaches to inquiry based on what Bernstein (1983, p. 128) terms "enabling" versus "blinding" prejudices on the part of the researcher have much to offer as we begin to grasp the possibilities offered by the new era. As we come to see how knowledge production and legitimation are historically situated and structurally located, "scholarship that makes its biases part of its argument"[5] arises as a new contender for legitimacy (Peters and Robinson, 1984).

My third assumption is that an emancipatory social science must be premised upon the development of research approaches which both empower the researched and contribute to the generation of change enhancing social theory. Shulamit Reinharz uses the term "rape research" to name the norm in the social sciences: career advancement of researchers built on their use of alienating and exploitative

inquiry methods (1979, p. 95). In contrast, for those wishing to use research to change as well as to understand the world, conscious empowerment is built into the research design. While feminist empirical efforts are by no means a monolith, with some operating out of a conventional, positivist paradigm and some out of an interpretive/phenomenological paradigm, an increasing amount operates out of a critical, praxis-oriented[6] paradigm concerned with both producing emancipatory knowlege and empowering the researched. I turn now to feminist efforts to empower through empirical research designs which maximize a dialogic, dialectically educative encounter between researcher and researched so that both become, in the words of feminist poet-singer, Cris Williamson, "the changer and the changed".

Postpositivist Feminist Empirical Practice

> This assertion of the priority of moral and political over scientific and epistemological theory and activity makes science and epistemology less important, less central, than they are within the Enlightenment world view. Here again, feminism makes its own important contribution to postmodernism--in this case, to our understanding that epistemology-centered philosophy--and, we may add, science-centered rationality--are only a three-century episode in the history of Western thinking.
>
> When we began theorizing our experiences during the second women's movement a mere decade and a half ago, we knew our task would be a difficult though exciting one. But I doubt that in our wildest dreams we ever imagined we would have to reinvent both science and theorizing itelf in order to make sense of women's social experience (Harding, 1986, p. 251).

The heart of this paper addresses three questions: What does it

mean to do feminist research? What can be learned about research as praxis and practices of self-reflexivity from looking at feminist efforts to create empowering research designs? And, finally, what are the challenges of postmodernism to feminist empirical work?

What Is Feminist Research?

Very simply, to do feminist research is to put the social construction of gender at the center of one's inquiry. Whether looking at "math genes" (Sherman, 1983) or false dualisms in the patriarchal construction of "rationality" (Harding, 1982), feminist researchers see gender as a basic organizing principle which profoundly shapes/mediates the concrete conditions of our lives. Feminism is, among other things, "a form of attention, a lens that brings into focus particular questions" (Fox-Keller, 1985, p. 6). Through the questions that feminism poses and the absences it locates, feminism argues the centrality of gender in the shaping of our consciousness, skills and institutions as well as in the distribution of power and privilege.

The overt ideological goal of feminist research in the human sciences is to correct both the invisibility and distortion of female experience in ways relevant to ending women's unequal social position. This entails the substantive task of making gender a fundamental category for our understanding of the social order, "to see the world from women's place in it" (Callaway, 1981, p. 460). While the first wave of feminist research operated largely within the

conventional paradigm (Westkott, 1979), the second wave is more self-consciously methodologically innovative (Eichler, 1980; 1983). For many of those second wave feminist researchers, the methodological task has become generating and refining more interactive, contextualized methods in the search for pattern and meaning rather than for prediction and control (Reinharz, 1983; Acker, Barry and Esseveld, 1983).

Hence, feminist empirical work is multi-paradigmatic. Those who work within the positivist paradigm see their contribution as adhering to established canons in order to add to the body of cumulative knowledge which will eventually help to eliminate sex-based inequality. Some, like Carol Gilligan (1982), start out to address methodological problems within an essentially conventional paradigm[7] and end with creating knowledge which profoundly challenges the substance and, to a less dramatic degree, the processes of mainstream knowledge production (Lather, 1986b). But it is to those who maximize the research process as a change-enhancing, reciprocally educative encounter that I now turn.

Research as Praxis

> There are hardly any attempts at the development of an alternative methodology in the sense of an "emancipatory" social research to be explored and tested in substantive studies (Krueger, 1981, p. 59).

Research as praxis is a phrase designed to respond to Gramsci's

call to intellectuals to develop a "praxis of the present" by aiding developing progressive groups to become increasingly conscious of their situations in the world (quoted in Salamini, 1981, p. 73). At the center of an emancipatory social science is the dialectial, reciprocal shaping of both the practice of praxis-oriented research and the development of emancipatory theory. In praxis-oriented inquiry, reciprocally educative process is more important than product as empowering methods contribute to consciousness-raising and transformative social action. Through dialogue and reflexivity, design, data and theory emerge, with data being recognized as generated from people in a relationship.

In another paper, I look at three interwoven issues in the quest for empowering approaches to inquiry: the need for reciprocity, dialectical theory building versus theoretical imposition, and issues of validity in praxis-oriented, advocacy research (Lather, 1986a). My task here is to look at some feminist efforts toward empowering research designs, focusing mostly on my own empirical efforts to study student resistance to liberatory curriculum, but briefly highlighting four other examples.

Mies (1984) field-tested seven methodological guidelines for doing feminist research in an action research project in Cologne, Germany, desiged to respond to violence against women in the family. A high visibility street action drew people who were then interviewed regarding their experiences with and views on wife beating. The resulting publicity led to the creation of a Women's House to aid victims of domestic abuse. A desire for transformative action and

egalitarian participation guided consciousness-raising in considering the sociological and historical roots of male violence in the home through the development of life histories of the battered women who came to the Women's House. The purpose was to empower the oppressed to come to understand and change their own oppressive realities.

Hanmer and Saunders (1984) studied the various forms of violence to women through community-based, at-home interviewing with the purpose of feeding the information gained back to the community in order to "develop new forms of self-help and mutual aid among women" (p. 14). Research involvement led to an attempt to form a support group for survivors of violence and make referrals to women's crisis and safety services. Like Oakley (1981) discovered in her interview study of the effects of motherhood on women's lives, Hanmer and Sauders found that, "Women interviewing women is a two-way process" (p. 20) as research participants insisted on interactive, reciprocal self-disclosure.

Acker, Barry and Essevold (1983), in a laudatory effort to "not impose our definitions of reality on those researched" (p. 425), studied women entering the paid labor force after years in a homemaking role in order to shed light on the relationship between social structure and individual consciousness. A series of unstructured interviews began with 65 women and followed 30 for five years. Data was used as a filter through which the researchers engaged in

> an ongoing process of reformulating our ideas, examining the validity of our assumptions about the change process, about how to conceptualize

> consciousness, the connections between changing life circumstances and changing views of self, others and the larger world, and how to link analytically these individual lives with the structure of industrial capitalism in the U.S.A. in the 1970's (p. 427).

Like Hanmer and Saunders, their work notes the insistence of the researched on reciprocal dialogue and is especially noteworthy for its attention to methodological discussion. Both studies do what Polkinghorne (1983) says is so important: "for practitioners to experiment with the new designs and to submit their attempts and results to examination by other participants in the debate" (p. xi). The methodological self-reflections of Acker et al are especially provocative as they wrestle with issues of false consiousness versus researcher imposition: "The question becomes how to produce an analysis which goes beyond the experience of the researched while still granting them full subjectivity. How do we explain the lives of others without violating their reality?" (p. 429).

A final example before turning to my own work is that of a group called Women's Economic Development Project (WEDP), part of the Institute for Community Education and Training in Hilton Head, South Carolina.[8] Funded by the Ford Foundation, low-income women were trained to research their own economic circumstances in order to understand and change them. The participatory research design involved eleven low-income and underemployed women working as community researchers on a one-year study of the economic circumstances of 3,000 low-income women in thirteen South Carolina counties. Information was gathered to do the following:

> 1) raise the consciousness of women regarding the sources of their economic circumstances;
> 2) promote community-based leadership within the state;
> 3) set up an active network of rural low-income women in S.C.;
> 4) support new and pending state legislation centering on women and work, and on educational issues.
>
> With the culmination of our research process, the mechanism to effect changes in the status of low-income women is in place. Women from across the state have come together through the project, and are stronger for it. The project, thus, has stimulated a process of consciousness-raising and action-taking that will continue to grow for a broad spectrum of S.C. low-income women in the years to come (January, 1987, research update).

A conference held March 13-15, 1987, was the second in a series designed to network low-income women in South Carolina. The First Statewide Women's Symposium in March, 1985 drew 150 from 20 of South Carolina's 46 counties.

The project's success, of course, depends on the degree to which low-income and underemployed women are at the center of this process of identifying and acting upon issues. Thus far, 150 of the women originally interviewed continue to participate in the project's ongoing efforts of "building self-confidence, developing a support network for getting and sharing information, and empowering underemployed women. . . building a statewide coalition of low-income women," developing leadership training and funding sourcebooks, and planning annual Statewide Women's Symposiums (1987 project pamphlet). As an example of praxis-oriented research, this project illustrates the possibilities for what Comstock (1982) regards as the goal of emancipatory research: stimulating "a self-sustaining process of

critical analysis and enlightened action" (p. 387) by participating with the researched in a theoretically guided program of action over an extended period of time. The WEDP is especially interesting for how the research process itself serves to engage people in the project's ongoing activities, activities designed to help people understand and change the material conditions of their lives.

Student Resistance to Liberatory Curriculum: Theoretically, my own empirical work is grounded in a desire to use and expand upon the concept of "resistance" as it has developed in recent neo-Marxist sociology of education[9] in order to learn lessons from student resistance in the building of what Giroux calls "a pedagogy of the opposition" (1983b). Rather than dismiss student resistance to our classroom practices as false consciousness,[10] I want to explore what these resistances have to teach us about our own impositional tendencies. The theoretical objective is an understanding of resistance which honors the complexity of the interplay between the empowering and the impositional at work in the liberatory classroom. As a taste of where we're heading, one of my graduate students came up with our research team's working definition of resistance:

> a word for the fear, dislike, hesitance most people have about turning their entire lives upside down and watching everything they have ever learned disintegrate into lies. "Empowerment" may be liberating, but is is also a lot of hard work and new responsibility to sort through one's life and rebuild according to one's own values and choices (Kathy Kea, Feminist Scholarship class, October, 1985).

This is far different from the standard usage: those acts of

challenge that agents intentionally direct against power relations operating widely in society (Bernstein, 1977, p. 62). There is something which tells me that the difference is rooted in what feminist and postmodern ways of knowing have to offer toward the development of a less patriarchal, dogmatic Marxism. But I jump ahead of myself. I want now to simply describe what I attempted with the research design that evolved throughout our first cycle of exploratory data gathering.

The study began with the intention of studying 20% of the 150 students who take our introduction to women's studies course each quarter. Within that approximately 30 students, I expected to find some who would not like the course. It is they I found of particular interest, given my theoretical concern with the processes of "ideological consent" (Kellner, 1978, p. 46), especially the processes by which false consciousness is maintained. What I had not anticipated was the combination of generally positive student response to the course with the way the experience of participating in the research project shifted in a more positive direction the reactions of even the few who did develop a critical stance toward aspects of the course.

Working with the ten researchers-in-training from my Feminist Scholarship class, we interviewed 22 students three times, at the beginning, middle and end of the course, regarding their attitudes toward and knowledge gained from the course. The second interview included collaborative group work on designing a survey to eventually be used as a pre/post-measure for purposes of on-going formative

course evaluation. In groups of 5-6, the students were first asked to articulate changes they perceived going on inside themselves as a result of the course and then asked to critique the questions the research team designed based on students' own words and sense of the issues. The third interview included collaborative group response to the preliminary report which summarized interviews one and two, the results of field-testing the survey, and findings from phone interviews with ten former students of the course. We also asked them to comment on what they saw as the impact of participating in the research process on their experience of the class.

So, what did I learn in a very hurried quarter of data gathering?

-Sequential interviews conducted in an interactive, dialogic manner that entails self-disclosure on the part of the researcher foster a sense of collaboration.

-Group interviews provide tremendous potential for deeper probing and reciprocally educative encounter.

-Negotiation of meaning did not play as large of a role as I anticipated. Students felt that the preliminary report accurately captured their sense of the situation. "Member checks" (Guba and Lincoln, 1981) seemed to have the major effect of contributing to a growing sense of collaboration as opposed to a negotiated validation of the descriptive level. Negotiation never even attempted either the collaborative validation of interpretation or, moving even closer to a fully participatory research design (see Lather, 1986a), the collective development of empirically grounded theory. I hope to push further on this dimension in my next go-round of data gathering.

-Issues of false consciousness and the dangers of conceptual overdeterminism in theoretically guided empirical work are every bit as complex as I had anticipated (see Lather, 1986a). Regarding false consciousness, for example, as I look for how students incorporate new oppositional or alternative concepts[11] into old ideological formations, I do not see the distortion of evidence that contradicts prior belief for which social psychologists argue (Unger, in press). Instead, the overwhelming response is, "My eyes are opened"; "Why didn't I see that before?" "It's like I'm just waking up;" or, my favorite, "The point is, I didn't know I didn't know." All involved became much more sensitive to the "psychological vertigo" that occurs in many students as a result of the course. One, for example, said, "I'm highly impressionable as I search for meaning. Can you be a feminist and do what's right for yourself and still have a husband and family? I don't want to lose my family in the finding of myself." And one of my favorites: "When you asked us where we stood on feminism at mid-term, it was the first time I became upset in the class. I didn't feel it was right to let myself change so much in such a short time."

Regarding the dangers of imposing researcher definitions on the inquiry, I know I had a preconceived notion of a "resister": someone so saturated with false consciousness that she could not see the "light" being offered her in our classrooms. The work of Ann Berlak (1983) began to focus my attention on the sins of imposition we commit in the name of liberatory pedagogy. And an emergent focus began to take shape: to turn the definition of resistance inside out somehow

so that it could be used to shed light on efforts toward praxis in the classrooms of those of us who do our teaching in the name of empowerment and emancipation.

I'm not sure where I want to go next. I will teach Feminist Scholarship again this fall and hope to work collectively on another cycle of data gathering, this time focused on the conditions which enhance the likelihood that students will begin to look at their own knowledge problematically and those that limit this process (Berlak, 1986). The goal is to shed light on the micro processes of the construction and deconstuction of ideology. I especially want to know the enabling conditions which open people up to oppositional knowledge. As a research team we will work collaboratively with the introductory students to use the research process as a context for reflecting on their experience of a class designed to challenge the dominant world view. The goal would be to understand what Fay (1977) considers crucial to the emancipatory project: knowledge of the conditions under which people are willing to engage in ideology critique. I see this as aiding the development of emancipatory pedagogy as well as exploring the methodological implications of critical theory.

Reflexivity

> Can an approach that is based on the critique of ideology itself become ideological? The answer is that of course it can. . . What can save critical theory from being used in this way is the insistence on reflectivity, the insistence that this theory of knowledge be applied to those propounding or using the theory (Bredo and Feinberg, 1982, p. 439).
>
> A maximally objective science, natural or social, will be one that includes a self-conscious and critical examination of the relationship between the social experience of its creators and the kinds of cognitive structures favored in its inquiry (Harding, 1986, p. 250).

C.A. Bowers argues that reflexivity and critique are the two essential skills we want our students to develop in their journey toward cultural demystification. I argue that the same is true for those of us who teach and do scholarly work in the name of feminism. As feminist teachers and scholars, we have obviously developed critical skills as evidenced by a body of scholarship which critiques patriarchal misshapings in all areas of knowledge (e.g., Spender, 1981; Spanier, Bloom and Boroviak, 1984; Schmitz, 1985). But developing the skills of self-critique, of a reflexivity which will keep us from becoming impositional and reifiers ourselves remains to be done.

As Acker, Barry and Esseveld so aptly state, "An emancipatory intent is no guarantee of an emancipatory outcome" (p. 431). Too often, we who do empirical research in the name of emancipatory politics fail to connect how we do research to our theoretical and political commitments. Yet if critical inquirers are to develop a "praxis of the present," we must practice in our empirical endeavors

what we preach in our theoretical formulations. Research which encourages self and social understanding and change-enhancing action on the part of "developing progressive groups" requires research designs that allow us as researchers to reflect on how our value commitments insert themselves into our empirical work. Our own frameworks of understanding need to be critically examined as we look for the tensions and contradictions they might entail. Given such self-reflexivity, what Du Bois (1983) calls "passionate scholarship" can lead us toward the development of a self-reflexive research paradigm that no longer reduces issues of bias to a canonized method of establishing scientific knowledge.

In my own research, the question that interests me most right now is the relationship of theory to data in praxis-oriented research programs. Gebhardt (1982), for example, writes: "what we want to collect data <u>for</u> decides what data we collect; if we collect them under the hypothesis that a different reality is possible, we will focus on the changeable, marginal, deviant apsects--anything not integrated which might suggest fermentation, resistance, protest, alternatives--all the 'facts' unfit to fit" (p. 405). Given my combination of feminism and neo-Marxism (or Neon-Marxism, as my students have christened me), I have some strong attachments to particular ways of looking at the world. The intersection of choice and constraint, for example, is of particular interest to me, given Marx's dictum that people make their own history, yes, but not under conditions of their own choosing. Also, I see gender as a central explanatory concept everywhere I look, including why male neo-Marxists

deny its centrality through what Mary O'Brien (1984) terms the "commatization of women" phenomenon.[12] A question I want to explore in my future empirical work is how such a priori concepts shape the data I gather and the ways in which that data is interpreted.

The Challenge of Postmodernism to Feminist Empirical Work

> Translation was never possible.
> Instead there was always only
> conquest, the influx
> of the language of metal,
> the language of either/or,
> the one language that has eaten all the others.
> (Margaret Atwood, 1986)

> this is the oppressor's language
> yet I need it to talk to you
> (Adrienne Rich, 1975)

> The demise of the Subject, of the Dialectic, and of Truth has left thinkers in modernity with a void which they are vaguely aware must be spoken differently and strangely (Jardine, 1982, p. 61).

Well, one could go on much more, of course. But I want to conclude with a note regarding the implications of postmodernism for the ways we go about doing emancipatory research.[13]

Those of us interested in the role of "transformative intellectual" (Aronowitz and Giroux, 1985) work within a time Foucault argues is noteworthy for its disturbing of the formerly secure foundations of our knowledge and understanding, "not to substitute an alternative and more secure foundation, but to produce an awareness of the complexity, contingency and fagility of historical forms and events" (Smart, 1993, p. 76). Within this postmodern context, "what

we know is but a partial and incomplete representation of a more complex reality" (Morgan, 1983, p. 389). The postmodern argument is that the dualisms which continue to dominate Western thought are inadequate for understanding a world of multiple causes and effects interacting in complex and nonlinear ways, all of which are rooted in a limitless array of historical and cultural specificities. The fundamental tensions between the Enlightenment and postmodernist projects provide a fertile instability in the most foundational tenets of how we regard the processes of knowlege production and legitimation. And, as Harding (1986) writes, "the categories of Western thought need destabilization" (p. 245).

Harding's critique of feminist critiques of sciences explores "the problem of the problematic" (p. 238) as she opposes objectifying versus relational world views (p. 185) and argues that feminism must run counter to "the psychic motor of Western science--the longing for 'one true story'" (p. 193). To avoid the "master's position" of formulating a totalizing discourse, feminism must see itself as "permanently partial" (p. 193) but "less false" (p. 195) than androcentric, male-centered knowledge. Harding argues that we find ourselves in a puzzling situation where the search for a "successor science" "epistemologically robust and politically powerful enough to unseat the Enlightenment version" (p. 150) is in tension with a postmodernism which struggles against claims of totality, certainty, and methodological orthodoxy.

This paper has attempted to explore both Harding's conundrum and the territory opened up by Irigaray's (1985) recommendation of a

detour into technique as we struggle toward "vision, self-knowlege, self-possession, even in one's decenteredness" (p. 136). What it means to decenter the self within the context of a feminism devoted to women's self-knowledge and self-possession continues to confuse me. Although I understand Longino (1986) and Harding's (1986) caution against a "suspect universalization" produced by a failure to decenter the self, I stand suspicious of what Meese (1986) warns as "a premature de-privileging of women as the political or feminist force within feminist criticism itself" (p. 79). While postmodernism makes clear that the supplanting of androcentric with gynocentric arguments so typical of North American academic feminism is no longer sufficient, Derrida argues for a necessary stage of "deconstructive reversal." "Affirmations of equality will not disrupt the hierarchy. Only if it includes an inversion or reversal does a deconstruction have a chance of dislocating the hierarchical structure" (Culler, 1982, quoted in Meese, 1986, p. 85).

Exchanging positions, however, does not disrupt hierarchy and, "What feminism and deconstruction call for is the displacement of hierarchicization as an ordering principle" (Meese, 1986, p. 85). The goal is difference without opposition and a shift from a romantic view of the self as unchanging, authentic essence to self as a conjunction of diverse social practices produced and positioned socially, without an underlying essence. The goal is, also, a discourse undistorted by the tendency to "write off the subjective factor excessively" (Ryan, 1982, p. 36), a characteristic of a postmodernism Ryan (1982) notes has been used in the U.S. "more for conservative than for politically

radical ends" (p. 103). While all this decentering and de-stabilizing of fundamental categories gets dizzying, such a relational, non-reductionist way of making sense of the world asks us to think constantly against ourselves as we struggle toward ways of knowing which engage us in the pressing need to turn critical thought into emancipatory action.)

Conclusion

> The most rigorous reading. . . is one that holds itself provisionally open to further deconstruction of its own operative concepts (Norris, 1982, p. 48).

In the quest for less distorting ways of knowing, the ideas presented in this paper need to be viewed as pieces of a transitory epistemology which can, given broad self-reflexivity, help make Harding's (1986) hope come true: that "feminist empiricism has a radical future" (p. 162). Those of us interested in the development of a praxis-oriented approach to inquiry, however, need to wrestle with the postmodern questioning of the lust for authoritative accounts if we are not to remain part of the problem ourselves.

ENDNOTES

1. Postpositivism: the era of possibilities that has opened up in the human sciences given the critique that has amassed over the last 20 years or so regarding the inadequacies of positivist assumptions in the face of human complexity (see Lather, 1986a,b).

Postmodernism (or modernity, as the French prefer): a term much argued about but generally referring to the need for a different mode of thinking, a relational versus an objectifying or dialectical world view. Peter McLaren has a wonderful extended note on this very fashionable and seductive movement in contemporary social thought (see note 6, 1986). I also find Jardine's (1982) short overview helpful.

Thus far in my reading of postmodern discourse, I find most interesting Kroker and Cook's (1986) statement that "Feminism is the quantuum physics of postmodernism" (p. 22, original emphasis) combined with Gayatri Spivak's (1985) warning that "the language of high feminism" (p. 254) is part of "the terrorism of the categorical imperative" (p. 248). Additionaly, I find myself intrigued with strategies of displacement versus strategies of confrontation. I know also that a relativized philosophy is dangerous for the oppressed. As I wrestle with all of this, I find David Byrne's words strangely comforting: "Empires in retreat get into some pretty weird stuff" (The Guardian, Nov. 19, 1986, p. 20).

2. Newton and Rosenfelt (1985) define materialist-feminism thusly:

> The criticism in this volume is 'materialist' in its commitment to the view that the social and economic circumstances in which women and men live--the material conditions of their lives--are central to an understanding of culture and society. It is materialist in its view that literature and literary criticism are both products of and interventions in particular moments of history. It is materialist too in its assumption that many, perhaps most, aspects of human identity are socially constructed. It is 'feminist' in its emphasis on the social construction of gender and its exploration of the intersections of gender with other social categories like class, race and sexual identity. It is feminist in its emphasis on relations of power between women and men, though it insists on examining them in the context of other relations of power and it assumes that such relations of power and the ways in which they are inscribed in texts change with changing social and economic conditions. Finally, this criticism is ideological--concerned with the relation of ideology, especially though not exclusively ideologies of gender, to cultural practice and to social change (Preface).

3. For background on and representatives of "new French feminisms" (as opposed to the "old French feminism" of Simone de Beauvoir), see: Irigaray, 1985; Delphy, 1984; Marks and de Courtivon, 1980; Jardine, 1985; Mois, 1985. See, also, Signs, 3 (4), 1978, entire issue, and Ideology and Consciousness, 4, 1978, entire issue. Jardine (1982) makes clear that the term feminist is problematic given that many of these women define themselves as beyond a feminism which is seen as "hopelessly anachronistic, grounded in a (male) metaphysical logic which modernity has already begun to overthrow" (p. 64).

4. This work was started under the auspices of a Bush Curriculum Development Grant, supplemented by Mankato State University Faculty Research Grants, Winter Quarter, 1986 and 1987. I especially thank my colleagues who also teach the introductory course for opening up their classrooms for purposes of this research: Clare Bright, Sudie Hoffman, Marilee Rickard, Lisa Dewey Joyce-Child and Carol Ann Lowinski. And the data gathering was a collective effort that included my Fall, 1985, Feminist Scholarship class: Sandy Parsons, Sharon Anderson, Kim Luedtke, Brenda Winter, Barry Evans, Diane Finnerty, Max Hanson, Edna Wayne, Kathy Kea and Eileen Grady.

5. Phrase used by Jean Anyon in a session of the American Educational Research Association annual meeting, Montreal, 1984.

6. Morgan (1983) distinguishes between positivist, phenomenological and critical/praxis-oriented research paradigms. While my earlier work used the term "openly ideological", I find "praxis-oriented" better describes the emergent paradigm I have been tracking over the last few years (Lather, 1985; Lather, 1986a,b,c). "Openly ideological" invites comparisons with fundamentalist and conservative movements, whereas "praxis-oriented" clarifies the critical and empowering roots of a reseach paradigm openly committed to critiquing the status quo and building a more just society.

7. Gray (1982) writes that Gilligan's initial concern was the shaky construct validity arising from hypothetical rather than real-life moral dilemmas. Intending to interview young men making draft resistance choices, she got an all-female sample quite by accident when the Vietnam War ended (p. 52). Abortion had just been legalized and Gilligan soon recognized the moral dilemma of whether to carry a child to full-term as a real-life situation with great potential for expanding the methodology of moral development research beyond hypothetical situations.

8. I read of this project in Participatory Research Newsletter, Sept., 1985 (229 College St., Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5T 1R4, 416-977-8118). The project itself can be reached through: Laura Bush, Executive Director, Institute for Community Education and Training, P.O. Box 1937, Hilton Head Island, South Carolina 29925. 803-681-5095.

9. See Giroux's review of neo-Marxist theories of resistance, Harvard Educational Review, 53 (3), 1983, 257-292.

10. Brian Fay (1977) argues that we must develop criteria/theory to distinguish between reasoned rejections by research participants of researcher interpretations and theoretical arguments and false consciousness. Fay writes:

> One test of the truth of critical theory is the considered reaction by those for whom it is supposed to be emancipatory. . . Not only must a particular theory be offered as the reason why people should change their self-understandings, but this must be done in an environment in which these people can reject this reason (Fay, 1977, pp. 218-219, original emphasis).

11. Raymond Williams, 1977, makes a very helpful distinction between alternative and oppositional (p. 114), with the former being one of many legitimate perspectives and the latter a clear intention of critique and transformation.

12. This argument is developed much more fully in Lather, 1985, where I look at how male neo-Marxist discourse on schooling largely obscures male privilege and the social construction of gender as central issues in the shaping of public school teaching. In contrast, it is worth noting the theoretical and strategical centrality given to the politics of gender in the work of some male postmodernists. Stephen Heath (1978-79), for example, writes, "Any discourse which fails to take account of the problem of sexual difference in its own enunciation and address will be, within a patriarchal order, precisely indifferent, a reflection of male dominance" (p. 53). Additionally, feminism is seen as a central site of resistance to capitalism. See: Ryan, 1982; Culler, 1982; Owens, 1983; Arac, 1986.

13. While I also view the confrontation of issues of empirical accountability in praxis-oriented research as a primary challenge, I do not repeat here work available elsewhere. See Lather, 1986a,b,c. For a lyrical exploration of the same issues in the area of historical/literary research, see Bunkers, 1987.

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